

The Voorlands

THE VOORLANDS

The land of Voors is found in the cold northeast of the Known World's principal continent, a country of steep mountains, windswept steppe, and vast taiga forests of spruce and pine. According to *Voors Land Of Heroes*, by the Archon Champion Grigori Kuzimka, the Voorlands is the true home of humanity, "The wellspring of all princely blood." Whether or not this is true, it is widely agreed that the city of Voors dates to before the Fall.

The city of Voors is built inside a gigantic canyon in the foothills of the Karulak Mountains. Only the very tallest towers of the city peek out over the canyon walls; the rest of the city is built on a series of terraces hacked out of the canyon over the centuries. Streets run in switchbacks back and forth along the terraces down to the canyon floor. For centuries, the people of Voors have dug mineshafts perpendicular to the canyon, and as the mines are exhausted they are roughly converted into housing, creating neighborhoods that never see the sun at all.

In fact, few citizens of Voors ever see the sun. The city thrives on mining and smelting, coal and iron, lead and tin and steel; this creates a vast cloud of smoke and soot that more or less permanently shrouds the canyon. Property near the top of the canyon, where you might sometimes glimpse the sun, is phenomenally expensive and essentially reserved for the ruling class. Everyone else lives down below, in the dark, beneath the eternal smoke.

Worse than living beneath the smoke - as far as the Voorish aristocracy is concerned - is to live in the provinces, far from Voors itself. The city is everything: culture, wealth, status, power. To the aristocracy, the provinces mean mud, cold, and filthy peasants.

Voors is ruled by the Champions Court, the Archon Champions (who have accumulated many other names as well): wielders of the Champion Swords, bearers of the legacy of the city's founders. They decide what is lawful; they grant (and withdraw) titles of nobility; they take what they please. Beneath them, an aristocracy scrambles and grapples with itself for more status, power, and money, in an environment where the strong take what they can and the weak accept what they must.

Voors is traditionally the rival of Kirenar and dominates Martens.

The City of Voors:

Sometimes called The Shrouded City.

Population: 180,000 in winter, 160,000 in summer.

Earth architectural reference: Moscow State University, Moscow Metro.

Earth cultural reference: Late 1800s Imperial Russian.

Language: Voorish.

Heraldry: Black hammer and white sword on interlocked grey background.

Voorish cultural notes:

Voors is a Hobbesian “paradise”, a constant battle of all against all, where the strong get away with what they can and the weak suffer what they must. There are many laws, but the question is always “will someone try to enforce them?” Every Voorish citizen must constantly calculate: If I do this thing, will I draw the attention of someone stronger? In Voors more than anywhere else, the flower that grows the tallest is the first to be cut down. Theoretically, anyone could strive to become an Archon, to ascend to the Champions Court, but at every step along the way, the contender would have to do battle with every other contender.

None of this crab-bucket struggle is apparent to the casual observer, as long as that observer has money. Come to Voors with money, and you’ll find a thriving society of well-off, cultured aristocrats who speak two or more languages and study music, literature, and religion. There is a social season of banquets, balls, and parties; a ready supply of theater; and a vivid parade of fashion.

Come to Voors without money, though, and you might very well find yourself enslaved. Voors has no laws protecting anyone’s rights or freedoms, and one can become a slave simply by being forced into enslavement. No one will come to save you. Most of the mining in Voors is done by the enslaved, and several merchants do a brisk trade selling slaves to foreigners.

Voorlanders generally consider humans superior to all other species, and they consider themselves to be superior to all other humans. This leads to hostility towards outsiders, especially non-human outsiders, and so very few non-humans are to be found in Voors. Even the Graditeli of Ladkovacnigrad, an ancient trading partner of Voors, tend to avoid the place.

The Voorish aristocracy:

Aristocratic titles in Voors are not formalized. The Archons might anoint one man a Count, another a Baron, and another a Duke, just to watch them fight afterward about who is ranked the highest. Despite this, the most common title is simply “Lord”, and the most common “title of rank” is “Count”. These titles are not inherently inheritable; a man must make sure his son is ready to protect what he inherits, lest it be seized by a rival.

Voorish military notes:

Voors maintains the only standing army in the Known World: the Helots. Over the centuries, the army of Helots has varied in size, professionalism, and effectiveness, but for over ten years it has been led brilliantly and effectively by General Vaden Raab. Raab is a serious military man, and the scion of an ancient Voorlander family wielding great political and economic power, to boot. He seized the leadership of the Helots during a border war with Martens, achieved a swift victory, and used his momentum to rid the army of many corrupt and incompetent officers. Now, Raab has built the Helots into a very tough and professional fighting force, and they love him for it. Raab’s Helot army includes infantry, cavalry, and artillery units, as well as a division of elephant cavalry and a company of sappers recruited straight from the mines. It is rumored that Raab himself has resisted calls from within the Champions Court to take the army to war.

Voors mints its own coins, as follows:

Gold Piece: Zolots

Silver Piece: Serebs

Copper Piece: Kotels

Platinum Piece: Borets (a rare coin, used by the aristocracy as proof of their higher birth.)

Voors is subdivided into the City and the Provinces. Please see below for more detail.

Domain	The City of Voors
Location	In the east-central region of the Voorlands, in the foothills of the Karulak Mountains.
Ruler	All of Voors is ruled by the Archons, the Champions Court. Local government is carried out to varying degrees by local tyrants. The city of Voors is ruled directly by the Archons, via decrees carried out by their Heralds.
Notes	Voors is a great, dark, smoke-wreathed city, a place of violence and greed, layers and layers of both streets and cultural strata. The streets are patrolled by the personal guards of the various aristocrats and the Helots with their signature half-plate and halberds. The whole city rings with the sounds of hammer and tongs from the mines and smithies, and the wealthy live behind thick walls and heavily-curtained windows to drown it out. Various small villages dot the plateau surrounding the canyon where Voors sits. These settlements house foreigners and non-humans who are unwelcome in the city proper. From time to time, groups of aristocratic young men will ride out from the city to raid these villages, and so those with the means to do so build thick walls and stout gates.
Lords	Marek Ozarko, one of the most prominent Archons. Pavel Vorony, another prominent Archon. Casimir Luchenko, a prominent Archon and arch-mage. Yvan Pryzhoda, a prominent Archon and favorite of the Church of Helios. Vaden Raab, General and commander of the Helot army.
Other	Voors exports metal ingots, finished metal products (especially weapons and armor), and slaves. The city produces almost no food of its own, and depends on a ready supply from the Provinces and huge imports from Bellgard. By far the most powerful criminal organization in Voors are the Red Hands. It is rumored that the leader of the Red Hands is called Seldom Seen. More obscure rumors hold that "Seldom Seen" is a title, not a name. Even more obscure rumors, whispered as quietly as possible, claim that the role of Seldom Seen is passed around among the Champions Court.

Domain	The Province of Greater Voors
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Location	In the east-central region of the Voorlands, in the foothills of the Karulak Mountains, in the uplands surrounding the city.
Ruler	The province surrounding the city is ruled by lords who are being punished by the Archons. This is barren land with but two potential resources: mining, and taxation of overland trade. Both are prohibited to the nobility and reserved for the Archons themselves, so being made lord of Greater Voors is a fool's errand. The current fool is Viscount Lev Sava Vashuta, last survivor of the Vashuta clan, the rest of whom were put to death for suspected rebellion. He is gradually losing his money and his mind trying to govern this province.
Notes	Greater Voors is a stony, windswept, dry and frozen steppe, running south into Vereskii and north into the Karulak Mountains. Nothing will grow here except moss and scrub. It is dotted with little fortified villages to house foreigners who have business in Voors but cannot live in the city for whatever reason.
Lords	Lev Sava Vashuta , previously content to be a third son, now the sole survivor of his family, with no idea what to do next. Soltan Tereshko , living openly as a Lord of the Red Hands, gently and almost apologetically extorting fees from overland merchants.
Other	Any man, woman or child who sleeps outside in the lands around the city will be taken by ghosts. It is known.

Domain	The Province of Riabinin
Location	North of the city of Voors, between the Karulak Mountains and the Grey Sea.
Ruler	Grand Duke Hosha Naumenko Lavryn rules from a bleak fortress on the slope of a mountain looking out over the forest of ash and poplar trees that reaches down the slopes and across the land to the seashore. The Lavryn family solidified their power generations ago by dealing plainly and fairly with the Graditeli of Ladkovacnigrad, earning themselves great wealth through trade. They also operate Lavrynto, the largest seaport in the Voorlands, that is the primary Voorish port of call for the Callentan fleets. Once a year, the Lavryns pay the Red Hands of Voors to ritually assassinate a few of their rivals in Voorish politics.
Notes	Riabinin is one of the greener stretches of the Voorlands thanks to the forested land, but produces too little food to export. The Lavryns do, however, maintain several lumber mills that export timber in the summer and firewood in the winter. The largest concentration of mills is in the town of Vratsa.

Lords	Hosha Naumenko Lavryn, Grand Duke, a clever man from a ruthless family. Oleshko Olbrycht Lavryn, Duke of Lavrynto, responsible for managing trade with the Callentan fleets. Khata Naumenko Lavryn, sister of the Grand Duke, secretly responsible for maintaining trade with the Graditeli of Ladkovacnigrad.
Other	It is rumored that the Grand Duke allowed his younger son, Elkin, to be educated and trained as a mage in Ladkovacnigrad. If true, this is a gigantic cultural faux-pas in Voors.

Domain	The Province of Travinto
Location	West of the Karulak Mountains and running west for hundreds of miles to the borders of Martens. A frozen tundra in the winter and a slightly-less-frozen expanse of mud in the summer.
Ruler	Count Gavriilo Ragozin Oliunov rules from the fortified town of Glupyi, along the Glupyi River on the southern border of his domain. From there, he and his knights ride out across the tundra in search of peasants to hunt. He is the third Oliunov ruler of Travinto, and believes like his father and grandfather before him that the key to keeping his position is keeping the province under control. Therefore, it is in his interest to punish the peasants before they have a chance to do anything wrong, on the principle that if left alone they will misbehave and draw the ire of the Archons down upon him.
Notes	Travinto has virtually zero economy. The peasant villages can barely grow enough food to support themselves, and Glupyi depends on raising and selling mediocre horses to Voorish merchants. The wealth of the Oliunov family comes from clever investments in Callentan shipping and (more recently) slave export, with the proceeds shrewdly banked with the church of Fusorin.
Lords	Gavriilo Ragozin Oliunov, Count of Travinto, a thorough bastard in his 60s. Nikita Vnukov, most senior knight in the Count's service. A tyrant in his own right. Molodoi Veraksin, a knight who loves nothing more than to ride back and forth across Travinto, slaughtering his own peasants.
Other	The most western stretches of Travinto are haunted by the ghosts of the many Martensen knights who died there during the last Voors-Martens border war, ten years ago. The western village of Lom has seen an accumulation of priests of Laeth over the years, all seeking to help the spirits find rest.

Domain	The Province of Polynka
Location	Southwestern Voorlands, bordering southern Martens and much of the Stillwater Marshes.
Ruler	Count Dimitri Stepenko Stupoi is the most recently installed provincial lord, and was surprised with the post after his predecessor died when his castle mysteriously burned to the ground. Count Stupoi currently governs from a flotilla of flat-bottomed boats which he is using to travel the province in a campaign to re-establish order.
Notes	Polynka is the wettest part of the Voorlands, laced with rivers running out of the Stillwater Marshes and down from the Martens Lowlands. These rivers wind through rolling grassland and steep, shadowy hill country, pooling here and there into lakes and swamps. There is some productive farmland in Polynka, enough to provide some wheat and barley to Voors each year, but the province has been so poorly governed for so long that the farms produce less than half what they could. The locals have many folktales about spirits haunting the waterways and wetlands. Every few decades, the church of Helios gets sufficiently angry about this to send a small detachment of priests and Crusaders to hunt and kill monsters. They mostly end up hanging peasants accused of witchcraft. Following the death of the last provincial governor, Baron Vasyly Afanas Afanas, who died without an heir, the people of Polynka began to rise up in defiance to the rule of the Archons. Count Stupoi actually has a brain and half a heart, so he is approaching his new rule with caution.
Lords	Count Dimitri Stepenko Stupoi, newest lord of the province, relatively young and experienced with the wider world. Mikhailo Chudin, a former knight, now the de facto leader of the peasantry in the westernmost part of the province, centered on the town of Veliko. Secretly affiliated with powerful foreign forces. Sitnikov, a druid who has chosen to stand up and make her presence known, teaching the eastern peasants how to raise more bountiful harvests and begin to resist the Archons and the church of Helios.
Other	It is rumored that Baron Afanas, the last ruler of Polynka, spent his last days sending messengers to the Archons pleading for aid. With what, or against what, is not known.

Domain	The Province of Vereskii
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Location	South of Greater Voors, east of Polynka, north of Kirenar, with the Grey Sea to the east.
Ruler	Duke Laurentii Krivoi Viskovyati, the second in his family to govern Vereskii, and probably the last.
Notes	A sprawling, grassy steppe inland, rolling down to salt marshes along the coast. The dying culture of nomadic tribesmen still spends their winters in Vereskii and their summers in Travinto. The Voorlander peasants live in motte-and-bailey villages with walls of mounded earth. If overland trade with Kirenar was still possible, the town of Verbovskii would be quite wealthy, but in the absence of that trade it is a half-empty, pale place, watching over a vast muddy ditch meant to mark the border. Tiny hamlets dot the coast, serving as homes for fishermen and hideouts for smugglers. Once, it was said that grain from Vereskii fed all of the Voorland. This has not been true for thirty years.
Lords	Laurentii Krivoi Viskovyati, who inherited the lordship from his unwise but lucky father. Laurentii is neither wise nor lucky, and between his political ineptitude and his gross mismanagement of the province, he is probably going to be replaced soon. Tokar Tur, technically a knight, in practice effectively the mayor of Verbovskii. It is only thanks to his leadership that the town is holding together. When Duke Viskovyati is replaced, Tur will probably take the blame for the province's decline, and be executed.
Other	The peasants of Vereskii joke that you could walk from Verbovskii in the south to Zagora in the north by stepping on the heads of hidden scouts from Kirenar, and never dirty your feet by stepping on the ground.

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